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ABSTRACT

Forty undergraduate subjects estimated for most students, and for themselves, the likeability and teaching effectiveness of college professors who were either positive or negative toward students, and either demanding or easy in their courses. "Most students" liked positive professors better than negative, preferred easy professors to demanding ones, saw positive professors as more effective than negative, and positive demanding professors as more effective than positive easy professors. The subjects personally liked positive professors better than negative, positive demanding professors better than positive easy, saw positive professors as more effective than negative and demanding professors as more effective than easy professors. Anonymous student evaluations of instructors were found to be very different from opinions expresses in typical student to student evaluations of faculty. (Author/DWH)

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Students' Public and Private Evaluations of the Likeability and Effectiveness of Professors

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Running Head: Public and Private Evaluations of Professors

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Students' Public and Private Evaluations of the
Likeability and Effectiveness of Professors

Byrne (1971) proposed that any stimulus that has reinforcing properties will elicit an affective response whether the reinforcing property be similarity (Byrne and Nelson, 1964, Triandis and Davis, 1965), physical appearance (Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; Berscheid & Walster, 1974), or personal evaluation (Byrne and Rhamey, 1965). More specifically related to the objective of this study Folkes & Sears (1977) have shown that people who are positive about other people, places and things are liked better than people who are negative about other people, places and things. In addition to being better liked, however, professors who have a positive reputation are judged as being more effective as teachers than professors who have negative reputations (McClelland, 1970; Leventhal, Abrami, Perry & Breen, 1976; Perry, Abrami, Levanthal and Check, 1979). It was hypothesized that professors who are reported as being more positive towards students will be liked better and rated as more effective than professors who are reported as being negative towards students.

A common observation of students talking among themselves is that students prefer the easy professor to the demanding professor. However, a study by Marsh (1980) rejects the notion that "instructors need only give higher grades and demand little work of students to be evaluated favorably (p. 234). A possible explanation of this discrepancy between typical student talk and Marsh's finding is that in Marsh's experiment the student evaluations of instructors were anonymous where as typical student to student talk about professors is very public. This publicity may then bring self-presentational concerns into play (Baumeister, Cooper and Skib, 1979). No student likes to be called "a brain," i.e. to appear to enjoy taking courses and studying--behavior that others consider as work. Conformity pressures would make the student put on an appearance of not liking study and course taking, and so put on an appearance of liking the professor

with the easy course that demands little work. Each student, then, as observer of this preference by other students would hypothesize that the other, the target student has an underlying trait supporting this behavioral preference. Even if the other, target student should deny that he/she has that trait, he/she "must acknowledge that the observer will interpret the expected behavior in relation to the attributed trait After all, if the target person (for whatever reason) behaves consistently with the observers expectancy, the observer will in all probability feel simply that the hypothesis has been confirmed (Baumeister et al, 1979, p. 425).

Likewise, if most students prefer the easy professor because of conformity pressures then it would be cognitively dissonant to simultaneously admit that the easy professor was ineffective. The general impression received, then, from most students is that they like the easy professor and see him/her as effective. It was hypothesized that in their own private evaluations subjects would see the demanding professor as more likeable and more effective than the easy professor, whereas the most student evaluations would see the easy professor as more likeable and more effective than the demanding professor.

Method

Subjects. Forty undergraduate students volunteered to take part in the experiment.

Materials. Subjects were given a short description of four hypothetical male professors. Each description was composed of two paragraphs: the first paragraph described the professor as a person; the second his expectations of students. The descriptive traits used in the first paragraph were based on Rubin's (1981) ten ideal traits for college professors, but only the interpersonal ones such as "accessible," and "helpful," were used. Humor was also added as a trait since it is a factor commonly used by students in evaluating an instructor's

likeability and effectiveness (Bryant, Comsky, Crane, & Zillman, 1980). One version of this paragraph described a professor positively on these traits, the other version described him negatively. In the positive version the professor was "interested in his students", was "always available", tried "to make his lectures enjoyable", and had "a good sense of humor", In the negative version the professor did "not show much interest in his students", was "seldom available", did "not think that lectures should be enjoyed", and had "a poor sense of humor", The second paragraph indicated the standards, demands, study, and work required by the professor. One version of the paragraph made the course sound very demanding; the other version made the course sound very easy. In the demanding version the professor "set high standards" and "made a lot of demands", and his courses required "much study and hard work." In the easy version the professor set "low standards" and made "few demands", and his courses did "not require much study or hard work." The two versions of each paragraph were combined to give four different descriptions: the positive-demanding, the positive-easy, the negative-demanding, and the negative-easy professor. Four names were picked for the professors and each name was rotated through each description. This gave four sets of names by description and the order of the descriptions in each set was arranged randomly.

Procedure. Subjects were asked to read through the four descriptions twice, and then to complete a set of four 8-point scales for each description. In the first two scales of each set subjects estimated how most students would evaluate the likeability and teaching effectiveness of the professor. In the second two scales subjects gave their own evaluation of the professors likeability and teaching effectiveness. Subjects were told that they could refer back as often as necessary to the descriptions of the professors.

Experimental Design. A 2x2 factorial design was used in the experiment, with

professors' attitude to students (positive, negative) and course expectations (demanding, easy) as the factors involved. The dependent measures were, "most student" likeability ratings of professors, "most student" effectiveness ratings of professors, subjects' own likeability ratings of professors, and subjects' own effectiveness ratings of professors.

Results

The means and standard deviations for "most student" ratings and subjects' own ratings are given in Table I.

Insert Table I About Here

The data were analyzed via a 2x2 repeated measures analysis of variance with professor attitudes (positive, negative) and course requirements (demanding, easy) as the factors involved.

Most Students

Likeability Ratings. The positive professor was liked better than the negative professor, $F(1,39)=218.30$, $p<.001$, and the easy professor was liked better than the demanding professor, $F(1,39)=23.19$, $p<.001$.

Effectiveness Ratings. The positive professor was considered more effective than the negative professor, $F(1,39)=94.15$, $p<.001$, but the easy professor was not considered more effective than the demanding professor. Instead an interactional effect, $F(1,39)=8.23$, $p<.005$, showed that the positive demanding professor was considered more effective than the positive easy professor.

Subjects Themselves

Likeability Ratings. The positive professor was liked better than the negative professor, $F(1,39)=141.09$, $p<.001$, but the demanding professor was not

liked better than the easy professor. However, an interactional effect, $F(1,39)=3.11$, $p<.08$ indicated that the positive-demanding professor was liked better than the positive-easy professor, and the negative-demanding liked less than the negative-easy professor.

Effectiveness Ratings. The positive professor was considered more effective than the negative professor, $F(1,39)=133.38$, $p<.001$, and the demanding professor was considered more effective than the easy professor, $F(1,39)=8.79$, $p<.005$.

Discussion

With competition for teaching positions increasing, and with evaluation by students as a major determinant of a professor's continuance on staff, (especially in smaller colleges), it is tempting for a professor to think that if he or she comes across positively to students and is easy on students he or she will receive high student ratings. This study indicates that the temptation to link easy courses with higher student ratings is based only on the public statement of students. The subjects in the experiment saw other students preferring the easy professor to the demanding professor, yet the subjects themselves did not prefer the easy professor to the demanding professor. Instead the subjects themselves preferred a professor who was positive towards students and demanded a lot of work to a professor who was positive but demanded very little. The present study, then agreed with Marsh (1980) that "harder, more difficult classes which required more time outside of class were rated more favorably" (p. 236) but only if the professor teaching these courses was positive toward students. Not only that: the subjects estimated that even though most students would like the easy professor better than the demanding professor they would not see the easy professor as more effective than the demanding professor. Instead they estimated that most students would consider the positive demanding professor as more effective

than the positive easy professor. The subjects themselves quite clearly saw the demanding professor as more effective than the easy professor.

The results of this study have important motivational implication for instructors in higher education. Most instructors would agree that if greater learning demands are placed on students higher educational standards will result. The present study indicates that greater demands will also get higher effectiveness ratings for professors, and if combined with a positive attitude to students will get higher likeability ratings as well.

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Table I

Means and Standard Deviations Summary

Dependent Variable	Attitude to students		Course Expectations	
	Positive	Negative	Demanding	Easy
Most Student - Liking				
M	7.23	2.86	4.63	5.46
SD	.86	1.86	1.40	1.32
Most Student - Effectiveness				
M	6.46	3.38	5.09	4.75
SD	1.46	2.07	1.79	1.73
Student's Own - Liking				
M	6.84	3.15	5.03	4.96
SD	1.34	1.83	1.64	1.53
Student's Own - Effectiveness				
M	6.35	3.16	5.29	4.23
SD	1.38	2.03	1.73	1.68